



State of Connecticut
COMMISSION ON HUMAN RIGHTS AND OPPORTUNITIES

Central Office ~ 25 Sigourney Street, Hartford, CT 06106

Promoting Equality and Justice for all People

**Testimony to the Judiciary Committee
Friday, March 23, 2015**

Good afternoon, Senator Coleman, Representative Tong, Senator Kissel, Representative Reimbias and members of the Judiciary Committee, my name is Tanya Hughes. I am the executive director for the Commission on Human Rights and Opportunities.

The CHRO **SUPPORTS** Raised **SB 1111**, AN ACT CONCERNING THE DUTIES OF THE COMMISSION ON HUMAN RIGHTS AND OPPORTUNITIES AND THE REMOVAL OF THE TERMS "CRIPPLED" AND "DEFECTIVE EYESIGHT" FROM THE GENERAL STATUTES.

In 2011 the General Assembly passed what became PA 11-237. That was the most significant change to the CHRO's procedural statutes in history. As a result of that legislation we have seen a 23% increase in the number of complaints we have closed from four years ago. We have reduced our backlog significantly; aged cases are less than 5% of our total case inventory.

The CHRO has contracts with the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission and the Dept. of Housing and Urban Development. These federal agencies pay the CHRO a fee for each case we close, which goes into the State's general fund. The turnaround we have seen from PA 11-237 has led to a substantial increase in our federal funding. Before PA 11-237, less than 20% of the CHRO's budget was returned to the general fund from federal dollars. Today it is over 30%.

SB 1111 finishes what PA 11-237 started by making further improvements and refinements to the CHRO's case processing. These changes will increase the CHRO's speed and efficiency in processing discrimination cases, which will lead to an increase in federal funding.

SB 1111 will speed up the CHRO's case processing in many ways. Section 7 combines the current Merit Assessment Review and Legal Review into a single step that reduces case processing time from 150 to 60 days. Complaints will be served within 15 days, rather than 20. The initial review of the file will take place within 60 days of filing the answer instead of 90.

There is also a change in terminology; a Merit Assessment Review would be renamed a Case Assessment Review to eliminate the misperception that passing through this initial stage is an indication of the strength of a case.

One new feature in SB 1111 is a no-fault conciliation process which a respondent may elect to participate in as soon as the respondent receives a complaint. There would be no need to file an answer or respond to the CHRO's requests for information unless conciliation was unsuccessful. This gives employers an option and can cut costs for businesses.

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To maintain neutrality in the mediation process, another new feature in SB 1111 is to separate the mediation and investigatory functions so that the same person conducting the mediation would not also investigate the case. This is a change sought by both the Complainants' and Respondents' bar. The bill also makes some technical changes that clarify the roles and responsibilities of the executive director and staff.

The many small changes in procedure this bill would make will allow the CHRO to make further strides in improving its operational efficiency and increase public confidence in the agency's decision-making process.

The CHRO also supports the removal of the terms "cripples" and "defective eyesight" in sections 19 through 22 of the bill. These are antiquated terms that in no way reflect the abilities of all of our citizens. Removing these archaic and hurtful references to persons with disabilities is long overdue.

We thank you for your ongoing support of human rights and the CHRO.